Divine Justice

By

Sayyid Mujtaba Musawi Lari

Translated from the Persian
By

Dr. Hamid Algar

Opinions Concerning God's Justice

The problem of justice as one of God's attributes has had its own distinct history. Various schools of thought in Islam have held different views on the subject, interpreting it in accordance with their own distinctive principles.

Some Sunnis who follow the views of the theologian Abu'l Hasan Ash'ari do not believe in God's justice as a matter of faith, and they deny that justice is accomplished by the divine acts.

In their view, however, God treats a certain person, and whatever punishment or reward He gives him, irrespective of what he might appear to deserve, will represent justice and absolute good, even though it might appear unjust when measured by human standards.

These Ash'aris, thus, distinguish God's attribute of justice from His acts and they, therefore, regard as just whatever can be attributed to God. If He rewards the virtuous and punishes the sinful, this is justice, but so would be the reverse; it would still be in the broad sphere of His justice.

Their claim that the very terms "justice" and "injustice" are meaningless when applied to God is no doubt intended to elevate God's most sacred essence to the position of the highest transcendence. But no thoughtful person will regard these superficial and inadequate notions

as having anything to do with God's transcendence. In fact, they involve a denial of order in the world, of the principle of causality both in the general order of the world and in the conduct and deeds of individual men.

The followers of al-Ash'ari believe, moreover, that the bright lamp of the intellect is extinguished whenever it is confronted with the perceptions and problems of religion, that it is unable to benefit man or light up his path.

This claim conforms neither to the teachings of the Quran nor to the content of the sunnah. The Quran considers disregard for the intellect to be a form of misguidance and repeatedly summons men to reflection and meditation in order to learn divine knowledge and religious beliefs. Those who fail to benefit from this bright lamp within them are compared to the animals. The Quran says: *"The worst of creatures in the sight of God are those persons who are deaf and dumb and do not reflect."*(8:22)

The Prophet of Islam says: "God has assigned two guides to man: one external to him, the messengers of God, and the other internal, his own power of thought.

* * * * *

The Mutazilites and Shi'ast and in opposition to al-Ash'ari and his school. Out of all the attributes of God, they have selected justice to be a principle of their creed. Relying on both transmitted and rational proofs, they have also refuted and rejected as incompatible with the principle of justice, the doctrines of the unmediated effect of divine destiny and the predetermination of man's acts.

They believe that justice is the basis of God's acts, both in the ordering of the universe and in the establishing of laws. Just as human acts can be weighed according to the criteria of good and bad, the acts of the Creator are also subject to the same criteria. Since the logic of reason determines that justice is inherently praiseworthy and injustice inherently reprehensible, an object of worship whose characteristics include infinite intelligence and spirit, will never undertake an act that reason regards as impermissible.

When we say that God is just, it means that His all-knowing and creative essence does nothing that is contrary to wisdom and benefit. The concept of wisdom, when applied to the Creator, does not mean that He chooses the best means for attaining His goals or remedying His deficiencies, for it is only man who is called on to move from deficiency toward perfection. God's concern is to make beings emerge from deficiency and impel them toward perfection and the aims inherent in their own essences.

God's wisdom consists of this, that He first implants a form of His favor within each phenomenon, and then, after bestowing existence upon it, impels it toward the perfection of

its capacities through a further exercise of His generosity.

Justice has, then, an extensive meaning, which naturally includes the avoidance of oppression and all foolish acts. Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq, peace be upon him, says in explanation of God's justice:

"Justice in the case of God means that you should not ascribe anything to God that if you were to do it would cause you to be blamed and reproached."[1]

With man, oppression and all the forms of corrupt activity in which he engages, derive, without doubt, from ignorance and lack of awareness and need coupled with innate lowliness; sometimes, too, they are the reflection of hatred and enmity, which leap forth from man's inner being like a spark.

Numerous are those people who are disgusted with their own oppressiveness and corruption. Nonetheless, because of ignorance about the final outcome of their deeds, they continue, from time to time, to act with injustice and pollute themselves with all kinds of shameful, corrupt deeds.

Sometimes man feels that he needs something that he does not have the resources or ability to acquire. This is the root cause of many evils. The feeling of need, hunger and greed, the prevalence in ma n of a desire to harm or dominate-all these are factors leading to aggressive behavior.

Under their influence, man loses the reins of self-control. He concentrates all his efforts on fulfilling his desires and violating all ethical restrictions, he starts squeezing the throats of the oppressed.

The unique essence of God, that infinite being, is free of all such tendencies and limitations, for nothing is hidden from His knowledge without bound, and it is inconceivable that He should suffer from impotence vis-a-vis anything-He, the Pre-Eternal One Whose eternal rays bestow life and sustenance on all things and Who assures their movement, variety and development.

A subtle essence that comprehends all the degrees of perfection stands in no need of anything so that its absence might induce anxiety in Him when He conceives a desire for it His power and capacity are without any doubt, unlimited and they do not fall short of anything so that He might then be led to deviate from the path of justice and transgress against someone, or take vengeance in order to quieten his heart or undertake some inappropriate and illsided act.

None of the motivations for unjust behavior can be found in God, and, indeed, the very concepts of oppression and injustice are inapplicable to a being Whose generosity and mercy

embrace all things an d the sanctity o f Whose essence is clearly manifest throughout creation.

The Quran repeatedly negates all idea of injustice by God, considering Him in His sanctity utterly removed from all unworthy acts. It says: *"God never considers it permissible to act unjustly toward His servants; it is rather men who commit oppression and injustice."*(10:44)

In this verse, God dissociates Himself from all notion of injustice, something repugnant to men, and, instead, attributes it to them.

In addition, how is it possible that God should call on men to establish justice and equity while at the same time staining His own hands with unrighteous deeds? The Quran says: *"God commands men to act with justice and virtue and enjoins upon them generosity to kinsfolk. He forbids them evil deeds and oppression. He admonishes you out of His mercy, so that you may accept His advice."*(16:90)

Islam values justice so highly that if one group of Muslims wish to deviate from the path of justice and start engaging in oppression, they must be repressed, even if this involves war. This is the command of the Quran*: "If two parties of believers fight with each other, make peace between them. If one of them has committed aggression against the other, then make war on the aggressor until he returns to observance of God's command. Once he has so returned, then reconcile them and make peace in utter justice. Certainly God loves the just."*(49:9)

The interesting point that emerges from this verse is that the mediator is strictly instructed to make sure, when bringing about reconciliation, that the dispute is settled in accordance with justice, without showing lenience to the aggressor. It may happen, in cases where war has been started for aggressive purposes, that a mediator tries to end the dispute by insisting on leniency and the overlooking of faults, and, ultimately, persuades one of the parties to renounce its claim in favor of the other. This lenient approach, although legitimate in itself, may reinforce the spirit of aggressiveness existing in those who gained by starting the war. It is, in fact, conventional to satisfy the aggressor in such cases by granting him some concession.

Although the voluntary renunciation of one's claim is a desirable act in itself, it will, under such circumstances, have an undesirable effect on the mentality of the aggressor. The aim of Islam is to uproot force and injustice from Islamic society and to assure its members that no one can gain anything by aggression and force.

* * * * *

If we look at the order of creation, we can see that a vast and comprehensive equilibrium prevails among all physical phenomena. This is evident in the regularity of the atoms, the

haste of the electrons, the rotation of the planets, and the movements of all bodies. It is visible in the mineral and vegetable realms, in the precise relations that exist among the organs of a living being, in the balance among the inner components of the atom, in the equilibrium among the vast heavenly bodies and their finely calculated forces of attraction. All these forms of balance and equilibrium, together with the other precise laws that science is still seeking to explore, bear witness to the existence of an undeniable order in the universe, one which is confirmed by mathematical equations.

Our veracious Prophet has expressed this universal justice and comprehensive equilibrium-the fact that nothing is irregular or out of place-in this concise and eloquent statement: "It is true equilibrium and symmetry that maintain the earth and the heavens."

The Quran attributes the following words to Moses, peace be upon him and our Prophet: *"Our God is the one who endowed all things with the needful and then guided them for the continuation of their existence."*(20:50)

In this short sentence, Moses expounds to the Pharaoh the manner in which the world was created together with its orderliness and beauty, which are among God's signs. His aim was to save him from his erroneous thoughts and help him perceive the existence of a just and divinely instituted order in the universe.

One of the norms ruling ineluctably over nature is, therefore, order and justice, and all things, by virtue of their subordination to the norms and laws of nature, are engaged in the process of evolution toward perfection that is specific to each of them. Any deviation from this universal pattern of order and the relations founded upon it would result in confusion and chaos.

Whenever some irregularity occurs in nature, phenomena themselves evince a reaction, and inward or outward factors emerge to remove the barriers to development and re-establish the order needed to continue on the path to perfection.

When the body is attacked by microbes and other factors of ill ness, white globules begin to neutralize them, in accordance with ineluctable norm. Whatever medicine may be prescribed is an external factor aiding the white globules in their task of neutralization and re-establishing equilibrium in the body.

Finally, it is impossible that God, Whose love is infinite and Who unstintingly grants His favors to His servants, should perform the slightest unjust or inappropriate act. This is, indeed, what the Quran proclaims: *"It is God Who has made the earth a place of abode for you, Who has raised the heavens, created you in the best of forms, and given you delicious and pleasing foods as sustenance. This is God, your Lord."*(40:64)

An Analysis of Misfortune and Hardship

The question o f God's justice involves certain problems, such as the existence of disasters, loss and evil in the natural order, and inequalities in the social order. This question arouses, in fact, a whole storm of questions and objections in the minds of many people. The problems they face are so fundamental that what start out as doubts and hesitations, ultimately become an indissoluble complex.

Such people ask how it is possible that in a world created on the basis of intelligence and wisdom, so much suffering, pain and evil should prevail; that the world should be subjected constantly to the successive blows of hardship and misfortune, with loss and deficiency always in the ascendant.

Why is it that in various parts of the world, terrible, overwhelming events assault mankind, resulting in untold loss and destruction? Why is one person ugly and another beautiful, one healthy and another sick? Why are all men not created equal, and does not their inequality point to an absence of justice in the universe?

Justice in the order of things depends on its being free of oppression, discrimination and disaster, or the absence from it of all defect, sickness, and poverty; this, they say, alone would result in perfection and justice.

* * * * *

We must begin by admitting that our evaluation of the affairs of the universe does not permit us to penetrate the ultimate depths of phenomena; it is inadequate for the analysis of the ends and purposes of things.

Our initial understanding of unpleasant events and disasters is bound to be superficial; we are not prepared to recognize any truth lying beyond our initial impression. We cannot, at the outset, delineate the ultimate aims of those events, and we, therefore, regard them as signs of injustice. Our feelings become aroused and lead us into the most illogical analyses.

But if we reflect more profoundly, we will see that this one-sided evaluation of events we label injustice comes from making our interests or those of people to whom we are directly or indirectly related, our criterion and yardstick. Whatever secures our interests is good, and whatever harms us is bad. In other words, our judgment of good and bad is based on a short-eyed perception, narrow horizons of thought, and a lack of precise knowledge concerning the norms of creation.

Is our existence the only issue involved in every occurrence? Can we make our own profit and loss into the criterion of good and evil? Our material world is constantly engaged in

producing change. Events that did not exist today will occur tomorrow; some things will disappear and others will take their place.

It is obvious that what is useful and beneficial for some people today will cease to exist tomorrow. But for us who are human beings and attached to our own existence and the things of the world, the acquisition of things is good and their loss is bad. But despite man and his attachments, the changing nature of the world produces constantly changing phenomena. If the world did not comprehend the possibility of change, phenomena themselves would not exist, and, therefore, there could also be no question of good and evil.

In such a hypothetical, unchanging world there would be neither loss and deficiency nor growth and development, no contrast or differentiation, no variety or multiplicity, no compounding or motion. In a world without deficiency or loss, there would also be no human, moral or social criteria, limits, or laws. Development and change are the result of the motion and rotation of the planets; if they ceased to exist, there would be no earth, no moon and no sun, no day, no month and no year.

* * * * *

A somewhat comprehensive view of the world will permit us to understand that what is harmful for us today, or may be so in the future, is beneficial for others. The world as a whole moves in the direction dictated by the overall purpose of being and benefit of being; individuals may suffer harm in this process, and it may even be that mankind at large does not stand to benefit.

Were we able to plunge deeply enough into the ocean of knowledge and turn the pages of its book replete with mysteries with the finger of our understanding, the ultimate purpose and outcome of all events and phenomena would be revealed to us. However, our power of judgment is not sufficiently comprehensive to deal with the complex web that confronts us: we know neither the chain of preceding causes that have produced the phenomena of today, nor the chain of future effects those phenomena, in turn, will produce.

If it were possible for us to look down from above on the broad plain of the world, in such a way that we could see all the positive and negative aspects of everything, all the mysteries of everything occurring in the world; if it were possible for us to evaluate the effects and results of every event in history, past, present and future and everything occurring between pre-eternity and post-eternity, and, if this were possible for us, then we might be able to say that the harm of a given event outweighed its benefit and brand it as evil.

But does man have such comprehensive awareness of the horizontal and vertical chains of causality? Can he situate himself on the moving axis of the world?

Since we do not dispose of such an ability, since we will never be able to traverse so infinite a distance, however long be our stride; since we will never be able to lift the veil from all these complexities and take their due measure, it is best that we refrain from one-sided and hasty judgments that are based on our own short-sightedness. We should recognize that we must not make our own benefit the sole criterion for judging this vast universe. The relative observations we make within the framework of the limited data at our disposal and the specific conditions to which we are subject can never furnish criteria for a definitive judgment.

Nature may often be working toward the fulfillment of a particular goal that is unimaginable to man, given his conventional circumstances. Why cannot it not be supposed that unpleasant occurrences are the result of efforts aimed at preparing the ground for a new phenomenon that will be the instrument of God's will upon earth? It may be that the conditions and circumstances of the age necessitate such processes.

If all the changes and upheavals that terrify us did not take place within a given plan and design and for the sake of a specific aim, if they were to be extended throughout time without producing any positive or constructive result, there would be no trace on earth of any living creature, including man.

Why should we accuse the world of injustice, of being chaotic and unstable, simply because of a few exceptional occurrences and phenomena in nature? Should we start objecting because of a handful of unpleasantnessess, major and minor, forgetting all the manifestations of precision and wisdom, all the wonders we see in the world and its creatures, that testify to the will and intelligence of an exalted being?

Since man sees so much evidence of careful planning throughout the universe, he must admit that the world is a purposive whole, a process moving toward perfection. Every phenomenon in it is subject to its own specific criterion, and if a phenomenon appears inexplicable or unjustifiable, this is because of man's shortsightedness. Man must understand that in his finiteness, he lacks the capacity to understand the aims of all phenomena and their content; it is not that creation has any defect.

Our attitude to the bitter and unpleasant occurrences of this world resemble the judgment made by a desert dweller when he comes to the city and sees powerful bulldozers destroying old buildings. He regards this demolition as a foolish act of destruction, but is it logical on his part to think that the demolition is unplanned and purposeless? Of course not, because he sees only the process of demolition, not the calculations and plans of the architects and others involved.

As a certain scientist said: "Our state is like that of children who watch a circus packing up and preparing to move on. This is necessary for the circus to go elsewhere and continue with

its life of excitement, but those short-sighted children see in the folding of the tents and the comings and goings of men and animals nothing but the dissolution and termination of the circus."

* * * * *

If we look a little more deeply and imaginatively at the misfortunes and disasters that plague man and interpret them correctly, we will appreciate that in reality, they are blessings, not disasters. A blessing being a blessing, and a disaster being a disaster is de pendent upon man's reaction to it; a single event may be experienced quite differently by two different people.

Misfortune and pain are like an alarm warning man to remedy his deficiencies and errors; they are like a natural immune system or regulatory mechanism inherent in man.

If wealth leads to self-indulgence and pleasure-seeking, it is a misfortune and a disaster, and if poverty and deprivation lead to the refinement and development of the human soul, they are a blessing. Thus, wealth cannot be counted as absolute good fortune nor poverty as absolute misfortune. A similar rule covers whatever natural gifts man may possess.

Nations who are confronted by various hostile forces and compelled to struggle for their survival are strengthened thereby. Once we regard effort and struggle to be a positive and constructive endeavor, we cannot overlook the role played by hardships in developing man's inner resources and impelling him to progress.

People who are not obliged to struggle and who live in an environment free of all contradiction will easily be immersed by material prosperity in their pleasures and lusts.

How often it happens that someone willingly endures hardship and pain for the sake of a great goal! Were it not for that hardship and pain, the goal might not appear so desirable to him! A smooth path along which one advances blindly and mechanically is not conducive to development and growth, and a human effort from which the element of conscious will has been removed cannot produce a fundamental change in man.

Struggle and contradiction are like a scourge impelling man forward. Solid objects are shattered by the pressure of repeated blows, but men are formed and tempered by the hardships they endure. They throw themselves into the ocean to learn how to swim, and it is in the furnace of crisis that genius emerges.

Untrammeled self-indulgence, love of the world, unrestricted pleasure-seeking, heedlessness of higher goals-all these Me indications of misguidance and lack of awareness. In fact, the most wretched of men are those who have grown up in the midst of luxury and comfort, who have never experienced the hardships of life or tasted its bitter days along with the sweet: the

sun of their lives rises and sets within, unnoticed by anyone else.

Following one's inclinations and adhering to one's desires is in compatible with firmness and elevation of spirit, with purposeful effort and striving. Pleasure-seeking and corruption, on the one hand, and strength of will and purposiveness, on the other, represent two contrary inclinations in man. Since neither can be negated or affirmed to the exclusion of the other, one must strive constantly to reduce the desire for pleasure and strengthen the opposing force within one.

Those who have been raised in luxury, who have never tasted the bitter and sweet days of the world, who have always enjoyed prosperity and never endured hunger-they can never appreciate the taste of delicious food nor the joy of life as a whole and they are incapable of truly appreciating beauty. The pleasures of life can be truly enjoyed only by those who have experienced hardship and failure in their lives, who have the capacity to absorb difficulty and to endure those hardships that lie in wait along every step of man's path.

Material and spiritual ease become precious to man only after experiencing the ups and downs of life and the pressure of its unpleasant incidents.

Once man is preoccupied with his material life, all dimensions of his existence are enchained, and he loses aspiration and motion. Inevitably, he will also neglect his eternal life and inward purification. As long as desire casts its shadow on his being and his soul is ensnared by darkness, he will be like a speck tossed around on the waves of matter. He will seek refuge in anything but God. He therefore needs something to awaken him and induce maturity in his thoughts, to remind him of the transitoriness of this ephemeral world and help him attain the ultimate aim of all heavenly teachings-the freedom for the soul from all the obstacles and carriers that prevent man from attaining lofty perfection.

The training and refinement of the self is not to be had cheaply; it requires the renunciation of various pleasures and enjoyments, and the process of cutting loose from them is bitter and difficult.

It is true that such exertions will be for the sake of purifying man's inner being and allowing his latent capacities to appear. Nonetheless, patient abstention from sin and pleasure-seeking is always bitter to man's taste and it is only through obstinate resistance to lower impulses that he can fulfill his mission of breaking down the barriers that confront him and thus ascend to the realm of higher values.

Hardship, a Cause of Awakening

Those who are drunk on the arrogance of power and success and who have totally forgotten

humane ethics because of the seduction of their soul and their senses will sometimes find, in various corners of the world, that the occurrence of unpleasant events makes them open to fundamental changes and developments that tear away from them the veils of forgetfulness. They may even be guided to a path leading to some degree of moral perfection and a future more fruitful than their present They are people in whom misfortune has induced a profound transformation.

Considering the harmful effects of neglectfulness and the intoxication of arrogance, on the one hand, and the numerous moral lessons taught by misfortune, on the other, it can be said that failure and misfortune are relative insofar as they contain great blessings; they contribute fruitfully to the building of man's awareness and will.

Hardship is, then, the preliminary to higher, more advanced states of being; it prepares man for the recompense that awaits him, and from his response to it, it becomes apparent whether he has attained the lofty degree of sincerity and devotion or is sunk in decay.

The Quran says: *"We have created man in the embrace of hardship." (90:4) Or, again: "We test you with fear, hunger, the loss of wealth and possessions, death, and the loss of the fruits of your toil . Give glad tidings to those who struggle manfully on this path that those who say when afflicted with calamity and pain, 'We are from God and to Him we return on our path to perfection,'-that it is they who receive kindness and mercy from their Lord together with their suffering, and they it is who are truly guided."*(2:155-57)

Without doubt, God could have created a world without hardship, pain and misfortune, but that would have meant His depriving man of freedom and choice; he would have been let loose in the world as a creature without will or the power of decision, just like any other creature lacking perception and awareness, formed exclusively by nature and totally obedient to it. Would he then have deserved the name of man?

Having paid the heavy price of losing all his innate capacities and freedom, his most precious resource, would he have advanced toward perfection, or decayed and declined? Would no t the world, too, have lost all goodness and beauty, these being comprehensible only in terms of their opposites?

It is plain that the power to distinguish and discriminate makes possible the existence of good and evil, of beauty and ugliness. By giving man the inestimable blessing of freedom and the ability to choose, God, whose wisdom is manifest throughout creation, wished to display fully His ability to create phenomena bearing witness to His wisdom and power.

He placed within man's being the possibility of doing both good and evil, and although He compels him to do neither, He always expects him to do good. God does not approve of evil; it is righteous conduct that meets with His approval and, in exchange for which He provides

abundant, unimaginable reward. God warns man against following the path of evil and threatens him with punishment and torment if he does so.

Thus, by using the power of choice that God has bestowed on him, man can act as he should, conforming both to divine guidance and to his own conscience.

But, if occasionally his foot should slip and he should commit some sin, the path remains open for him to return to purity and light, to God's favor and mercy. This is in itself a further manifestation of God's generosity and all-embracing justice, one more of the blessings He bestows on His servants.

Were God to give immediate reward to the virtuous for their righteous conduct and acts, they would not in any way be superior to the corrupt and the sinful. And if the evil in thought and in deed were to be always met with instant punishment and retribution, virtue and purity would not enjoy any superiority in this world to vice and impurity.

* * * * *

The principle of contradiction, is, in fact, the basis of the created world; it is what enables matter to change and evolve so that God's grace flows through the world. Were matter not to take on different shapes as a result of its encounter with various beings and were being unable to accommodate new forms within itself, the differentiation and advancement of being would be impossible. A stable and unchanging world would resemble stagnant capital that produces no profit For creation, change is the capital that brings about profit It is, of course, possible that the investment of a certain portion of capital should result in loss, but the constant motion of matter as a whole definitely results in profit The contradiction that takes place in the forms of matter results in the advancement of the order of being toward perfection.

There is some question as to whether evil exists in the world in the real sense of the word. If we look carefully, we will see that the evil of things is not a true attribute; it is a relative one.

Firearms in the hands of my enemy are an evil for me, and firearms in my hands are an evil for my enemy. Setting aside me and my enemy, firearms are in themselves neither good nor bad.

The course of nature can be said to be mathematical; that is, its system has been established in such a way as no t to answer all of our needs. We, however, wish to fulfill all our uncountless desires without encountering the least hindrance, and the forces of nature do not answer the limitless wishes we cherish, wishes which are in any event worthless from the point of view of our essential nature. Nature pays no attention to our desires and refuses to submit to our wants. So when we encounter unpleasantness in our lives, we become unjustifiably upset and we term the causes of our discomfort as "evil."

If someone wants to light his lamp when there is no oil in it, he will not start sighing and complaining or curse the whole universe!

Creation is constantly advancing toward a clear goal, through unceasing effort and striving. Specific causes determine each step it takes, and the changes and development it undergoes are not designed to meet men's approval or satisfy their desires.

It should be accepted that some of the occurrences of this world will not correspond to our wishes, and we ought not to regard as injustice things we experience as unpleasant.

Ali, peace be upon him, the Commander of the Faithful, describes the world as an abode of hardship, but nonetheless a good place for the one who knows it properly. Although he encountered himself all kinds of hardship and unpleasantness, he constantly drew men's attention to the absolute justice of God.[2]

Another important point which must not be overlooked is that good and evil do not represent two mutually exclusive categories or series in the order of creation. Goodness is identical with being, and evil is identical with non-being; wherever being makes its appearance, non-existence is also implied.

When we speak of poverty, indigence, ignorance or disease we should not imagine that they have separate realities: poverty is simply not having wealth, ignorance is the absence of knowledge, and disease is the loss of health. Wealth and knowledge are realities, but poverty is nothing other than the emptiness of the hand and the pocket, and ignorance, the absence of knowledge. Hence poverty and ignorance have no tangible reality; they are defined through the non-existence of other things.

The same is the case with calamities and misfortunes that we regard as evil and the source of suffering. They, too, are a kind of loss or non-being, and are evil only in the sense that they result in the destruction or non-existence of something other than themselves. Apart from this, nothing, insofar as it exists, can in any way be called evil or ugly.

If calamities did not entail sickness and death, the loss and ruin of certain creatures, thus preventing their capacities from unfolding, they would not be bad. It is the loss and ruin arising from misfortunes that is inherently bad. Whatever exists in the world is good; evil pertains to non-being, and since non-being does not form a category independent of being, it has not been created and does not exist.

Being and non-being are like the sun and its shadow. When a body is turned to the sun, it casts a shadow. What is a shadow? The shadow has not been created by anything; it consists simply of the sun not shining in a given place because of the existence of an obstacle; it has

no source or origin of its own.

Things have a real existence by virtue of having been created without reference to things other than them; in this sense, they are not evil. For a worldview derived from belief in God, the world is equivalent to good. Everything is inherently good; if it is evil, it is so only in a relative sense and in connection with things other than itself .The existence of every thing is unreal for other than it self, and untouched by creation.

The malarial mosquito is not evil in itself. If it is described as such, it is because it is harmful to man and causes disease. That which is created is the existence of a thing in and of itself, which is a true existence; speculative or conditional existence has no place in the order of being and is not real. We cannot, therefore, ask why God has created relative or conditional existence. Conditional or abstract entities are inseparable from the real entities that give rise to them; they are their inevitable concomitants and do not partake of their being. One cannot then speak of conditional entities having been created.

That which is real must necessarily derive its being from the Creator. Only those things and attributes are real that exist outside the mind. Relative attributes are created by the mind and have no existence outside it so one cannot go looking for the creator.

Furthermore, that which has the potential to exist is the world as a whole, with all the objects it contains and the attributes that are inseparable from it; the world represents an indivisible unit. From the vantage point of God's wisdom, either the world must exist on the pattern that is peculiar to it, or it cannot exist at all.

A world without order or lacking the principle of causality, a world where good and evil were not separate from each other, would be an impossibility and a fantasy. It is not possible to suppose that one part of the world should exist and another should not. Creation is a whole, like the form and figure of man, and its parts are inseparable from each other.

God is absolutely free of all need, and one consequence of this is that He freely bestows being, like a generous man whose largess expects no return, or like a skilled artist who is constantly busy with the creation of new forms. Such abundant generosity and creativity define the essence of the Lord Whose signs are manifest and evident in every phenomenon.

Some Aspects of Inequality

Suppose that the owner of a factory employs both skilled and unskilled workers to operate and administer his factory. When it is time to pay their wages, he pays the skilled and qualified workers, whose job is at a higher level, more than the unskilled workers. Now, is this difference in wages just or unjust? Is the factory owner acting equitably or inequitably?

Doubtless there is a difference involved here, but we cannot call it discrimination. Justice does not require the factory owner to pay unskilled workers the same as skilled workers. It means rather that he should give to each category what it deserves. Such a rule will clearly delineate the comparative value of each job and contribute to the welfare of the workplace.

To make distinctions in such cases is an eloquent and practical form of justice; not to do so would be equivalent to oppression, discrimination and injustice; it would be the result of an inadequate appreciation of the relative value of things in their differentiation.

When we look at the world as a whole and analyze its various parts, we see that each part has its own special position and function and is clothed in the qualities that are suitable to it. In the light of this realization, we can understand the necessity of vicissitudes in human life, of light and darkness, of success and failure, for maintaining the general equilibrium of the world.

If the world were to be uniform, without variation or difference, the varied and multiple species of being would not exist. It is precisely in this abundant variety and multiplicity that do exist that we see the splendor and magnificence of the world. Our judgment of things will be logical, correct, and acceptable when we take into consideration the equilibrium prevailing in the universe and the interrelations that beneficially bind its various parts to each other, not when we examine the part in isolation form the whole.

The order of creation is based on equilibrium, on receptivities and capacities; what is firmly established in creation is differentiation, not discrimination. This observation makes it possible for us to examine the matter more objectively and specifically. Discrimination means making a difference among objects possessing the same receptivities and existing under the same circumstances.

Differentiation means making a difference among capacities that are unequal and not subject to the same circumstances.

It will be erroneous if we say that it would be better for everything in the world to be uniform and undifferentiated, for all the motion, activity and lively interchange we see in the world is made possible by differentiation.

Man has various ways of perceiving and experiencing beauty, once there is a contrast between ugliness and beauty. The attraction exerted by beauty is, in a sense, the reflection of ugliness and its power to repel.

In the same way, if man were not tested and tried in life, piety and virtue would have no value, and there would be no reason to refine one's soul and nothing from which to restrain

one's desires.

If a whole canvas is covered in a uniform way, we cannot speak of it being a picture; it is the variation of color and detail that displays the skill of the artist.

In order for the identity of a thing to be known, it is essential that it be differentiated from other things, for the measure by which things or persons are recognized is the outer or inner differences they have with each other.

* * * * *

One of the wonders of creation is the variation in the capacities and gifts with which beings are endowed. In order to ensure the continuance of social life, creation has given each individual a particular set of tastes and capacities, the interplay of which ensures the order of society; each individual meets some of the needs of society and contributes to solving some of its problems.

The natural difference of individuals with respect to capacity causes them to need each other. Everyone takes on some of the tasks of society according to his own taste and capacity, and the social life secured in that way makes it possible for man to progress and advance.

Let us take a building or an airplane as an example. Each of them has numerous separate parts, complex and detailed components that differ greatly from each other in size and form, this difference deriving from the responsibility that each component has toward the whole.

Were this difference not to exist in the structure of the airplane, it would no longer be an airplane but a compound of assorted metals. If differentiation is a sign of true justice in the airplane, it must also be an indication of divine justice among all the creatures of the world including man.

In addition, we must be aware that differentiation among beings is innate to their essence. God does not create everything with a separate and discrete exercise of His will; His will is not exercised individually. The entire world from beginning to end came into being with a single exercise of His will; it was this that enabled creatures in their infinite multiplicity to come into being.

There is, then, a specific law and order that regulates all the dimensions of creation. Within the frame work of causality, it as signs a particular rank and position to everything. God's will to create and regulate the world is equivalent to His willing order in it.

There are definite philosophical proofs in support of this proposition, and it is also expounded in the Quran: *"We created everything with a certain quantity and limit; Our act is but one,*

like the blink of an eye."(54:49-50)

It would be wrong to imagine that the differentiation and relations established by God in His creation are the same as the conventional relations existing in human society. God's connection with His creatures is not a mere convention or perceptual matter; it is a connection deriving from the very act of creation. The order that He has placed in all things is the result of His creating it. Every being receives from God the amount of perfection and beauty it is able to receive.

If there were no particular order regulating the world, any being might, in the course of its motions, give rise to any other being, and cause and effect might switch places. But it must be understood that the essential interrelations among things are fixed and necessary; the station and property bestowed on a thing adheres inseparably to it, whatever rank and degree of existence it may have. No phenomenon can go beyond the degree that has been fixed for it and occupy the degree of another being. Differentiation is a concomitant of the degrees of being' assigning to them differing amounts of weakness and strength, deficiency and perfection.

It would be discrimination if two phenomena had the same capacity to receive perfection but it was given only to one of them and denied to the other. The degrees of being that exist in the order of creation cannot be compared with the conventional ranks of human society. They are real, not conventional, and not transferable. For example, men and animals cannot change places with each other in the same way that individuals can change the posts and positions they occupy in society.

The relationship connecting each cause with its effect and each effect with its cause derives from the very essences of the cause and effect respectively. If something is a cause, it is so because of some property that is inseparable from it, and if something is an effect, it is so because of a quality inherent in it, which is nothing other than the mode of its being.

There is, then, an essential and profound order that links all phenomena, and the degree of each phenomenon within the order is identical with its essence' Insofar as differentiation relates to a deficiency indwelling in the essence, it is not discrimination, because the effusion of God's bounty is not enough for a reality to come into being; the receptivity of the vessel destined to receive the bounty is also necessary. It is for this reason that certain beings suffer deprivation and do not attain higher degrees; it is impossible that a thing acquire the capacity for being or some other perfection and that God not grant it to it.

The case of numerals is exactly similar each number has its own fixed place. Two comes after one and cannot change places with it. If we change the place of a number, we will have changed its essence at the same time.

It is clear, then, that all phenomena possess fixed ranks and modalities and are subordinate to a series of stable and immutable laws. Divine law naturally does not form a separate created entity, but an abstract concept deduced from the manner in which things are seen to exist. That which has external existence consists of the levels and degrees of being, on the one hand, and the system of cause and effect, on the other. Nothing occurs outside of this system, which is none other than the divine norm mentioned by the Quran: *"You will never find any change in the divine norm."*(35:43)

* * * * *

The order of creation is based on a series of laws inherent in its essence. The place of every phenomenon within it is clearly defined, and the existence of the various levels and degrees of existence is a necessary consequence of the systematic nature of creation, which inevitably gives rise to variety and differentiation.

Variation and differentiation have not themselves been created; they are the inseparable attributes of all phenomena. Every particle in the universe has received whatever it had the potential to receive; no injustice or discrimination has been visited upon it, and the perfection of the universe-resembling a multiplication table in its precise and immutable ordering-has thereby been ensured.

Materialists who regard the existence of variation and differentiation in the natural order as evidence of oppression and injustice and imagine that the world is not ruled by justice will inevitably experience life as difficult, unpleasant, and wearying.

The hasty judgment of the materialist confronted by hardship and difficulty is like the verdict of a child watching a gardener pruning the healthy, green branches of a tree in the spring. Unaware of the purpose and significance of the pruning, the child will think the gardener a destructive and ignorant person.

If all the bounties of the world were placed at the disposal of the materialist, he would still not be content For once the world is seen to be aimless and based on injustice, it is meaningless for man to seek justice, and in a world that is lacking an aim, it is absurd for man to set himself one.

If the origin and destiny of man are as the materialists depict them, such that he is a grass that grows of itself and then disappears, then man must be the most wretched of creatures. For he would be living in a world with which he lacks all affinity, compatibility and harmony. Thought, feeling and emotion would cause him distress, being nothing more than a cruel joke played on him by nature to increase his misery and wretchedness and augment his suffering.

Were a man of initiative and genius to devote himself to the service of humanity, what benefit

would it hold for him? Posthumous commemorations and honorings, ceremonies held at his tomb, would not benefit him in the slightest; they would serve only to maintain a hollow legend, because the person in question would have been nothing more than a form assembled by nature for its amusement as a plaything for a few days before being turned into a handful of dust.

If we look at the fate of the majority of people who are constantly struggling with various kinds of sorrow, anxiety, deprivation and failure, the picture grows still more bleak. With such a view of human life, the only paradise materialism has to offer man is a hell of terror and pain. The materialist position that man lacks freedom and choice makes of him an even more wretched creature.

The mono-dimensional worldview of materialism would have it that man is like an automaton, with the mechanism and dynamism of its cells operated by nature. Can human intelligence and instinct-not to mention the realities of existence-accept such a banal and petty interpretation of man, his life and his destiny?

Were this interpretation to be true, man would be as incapable of experiencing happiness as a child's doll. Placed in such a situation, man would be compelled to make of his own passions and inclinations the foundation of morality and the yardstick of value, to judge all things according to personal profit and loss. He would do his utmost to destroy every obstacle in his path and loosen all restraints on his carnal desires. Were he to act otherwise, he would be regarded as backward and ignorant.

Anyone who possesses the slightest amount of insight, and judges the matter in a disinterested and dispassionate way, will regard these short-sighted and fantastic notions as valid, however much they be decked out in philosophical and scientific sophistry.

A man with a religious worldview regards the world as an orderly system possessing consciousness, will, perception and aim. The supreme justice-dispensing intelligence of God rules over the universe and every particle of being and watches over all actions and deeds. A religious man, therefore, feels a sense of responsibility vis-a-vis the consciousness that rules over the world, and knows that a world created and administered by God is necessarily a world of unity, harmony and good. He understands that contradiction and evil have an epiphenomenal existence and play a fundamental role in the achievement of good and the emergence of unity and harmony.

Furthermore, according to this worldview which sketches out broad horizons for man, life is not restricted to this world, and even the life of this world is not restricted to material well-being or freedom from effort and pain. The believer in religion will see the world as a path that must be traversed, as a place of testing, as an arena of effort. In it, the righteousness of men's deeds is tested. At the beginning of the next life, the good and the evil in the thoughts,

beliefs, and actions of men will be measured in the most accurate of balances. God's justice will be revealed in its true aspect, and whatever deprivation man may have suffered in this world, whether material or otherwise, it will be made up to him.

In the light of his destiny that awaits man, and given the essential nullity of the goods of the material world, man orients his conscious striving exclusively to God. His aim becomes to live for Him and to die for Him. The vicissitudes of this world no longer claim his attention. He sees ephemeral things for what they are, and he allows nothing to seduce his heart. For he knows that the forces of seduction would cause his humanity to wither and draw him down into the whirlpool of materialistic misguidance.

* * * * *

In conclusion, we would add that even apart from the question of receptivity, the existence of difference in the world does not imply injustice. Oppression and injustice mean that someone is subjected to discrimination although he has a claim equal to that of someone else. But beings do not have any "claim" on God nor did they ever, so if some things enjoy superiority over others this cannot count as injustice.

We have nothing of ourselves: each breath and each heartbeat, each thought and idea that passes through our mind, are taken from a stock that we do not own and have done nothing to build up. That stock is a gift from God, bestowed on us at the moment of birth.

Once we understand that whatever we have is nothing but a divine gift, it will become apparent that the differences among the gifts He gives men are based on His wisdom but have nothing to do with either justice or injustice, because there was no question of any merit or claim on our part.

This finite and temporary life is a gift to us, a present from the Creator. He has absolute discretion in deciding the type and quantity of the gift that He gives, and we have no claim upon Him. We have, therefore, no right to object even if the gift given us quite free of charge appears slight and inconsequential.

Notes

1. Kifayat al-Muwahhidin, I, p.442.
2. Nahj al-Balaghah, ed., Subhi Salh, p. 493.